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Summary Report

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Summary of Presentations Red Deer Public Forum

February 14, 1992

Alberta
GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

TOWARD 2000 TOGETHER

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TOWARD 2000 TOGETHER

RED DEER REGIONAL PUBLIC FORUM
SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Red Deer Lodge
1:30 - 5:30 P.M.
February 14, 1992

GOVERNMENT PANEL

Hon. Don Sparrow (Chair) - Minister of Tourism

Halvar Jonson - MLA, Ponoka-Rimbey

Ty Lund - MLA, Rocky Mountain House

Connie Osterman - MLA, Three Hills

Gary Severtson - MLA, Innisfail

PRESENTATIONS

1. Private Citizen - Janet Walter

2. Alberta Culinary Arts Foundation - Maurice O'Flynn

3. Private Citizen - Elmer Cure

4. Red Deer Tourist and Convention Board - Wendy Martindale, Manager

5. Citizens' Dialogue, Community Overview - Marilyn Haley, Craig Curtis

6. Red Deer College - Dr. Ed Luterbach, President

7. Red Deer Chamber of Commerce - Pat Henry, Executive Director

8. Town of Ponoka, Economic Development Committee - Barry Neath, Chairman

9. Town of Didsbury - Clem Kuelker

10. Town of Caroline - Bob Kelly, Town Councillor

11. Village of Linden - Ross Dean, Municipal Administrator/EDO

ALBERTANS DISCUSS VIEWS ON ECONOMY
AT RED DEER PUBLIC FORUM

About 40 Albertans came out to hear 11 submissions presented to the Toward 2000 Together public forum held by the Alberta Government at Red Deer Lodge February 14. The meeting was the third in a series of public forums designed to give all Albertans a say in the development of a new economic strategy for the province. The forums are part of a major economic planning initiative launched by Premier Don Getty last August.

Submissions covered a wide range of issues from government's role in international marketing to the importance of developing an "entrepreneurial culture" to the need to balance tourism development with environmental concerns. Presenters included private citizens as well as representatives speaking for municipalities, business, community groups, and educational institutions.

Don Sparrow, Minister of Tourism, chaired the meeting and led the government panel receiving the submissions. Other panel members were MLAs Ty Lund, Rocky Mountain House; Halvar Jonson, Ponoka-Rimbey; Connie Osterman, Three Hills; and Gary Severtson, Innisfail.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Sparrow apologized for the absence of Family and Social Services Minister John Oldring, MLA Red Deer-South, and Stockwell Day, MLA Red Deer-North and Chairman of the Premier's Council on the Family. Both were attending Alberta's first Alberta Family Service Awards luncheon with the Premier.

Mr. Sparrow explained that setting new economic objectives for Alberta is a task best carried out by a partnership between government and the private sector. "We have much to gain by pooling our resources and bringing Albertans together in partnership to set new directions for our future," he said.

He said the government has been sending out some 200 Toward 2000 Together information packages a day in response to requests since the initiative started. "It's encouraging to see that Albertans are giving careful thought to the issues we've raised and the questions put forward."

Mr. Sparrow pointed out that his department is conducting a public input initiative called Tourism 2000, which is one of several government department initiatives aimed at complementing Toward 2000 Together.

SUBMISSIONS

The following are highlights of the written and verbal submissions presented during the forum.

1. Private Citizen: Janet Walter

Ms. Walter is chairman of the Alberta Farm Women's Network, which is made up of five farm organizations plus non-affiliated farm women. The group is not a policy body and, therefore, could not make a presentation. The rest of the committee has, however, seen her submission.

Noting that the terms "competitiveness" and "economic growth" pervade the Toward 2000 Together document, Ms. Walter said the initiative seems designed to

"continue the expansive profit goals of industry" through overdevelopment of our water, soil and food resources. Rather, she feels that we should redirect our efforts toward local processing and closed circle uses of our resources. "Only trade that is true barter and from natural regeneration production, meets reasonable economical, ecological and ethical criteria."

She said the Toward 2000 Together initiative "ignores the reality that our present levels of resource use are not sustainable." Ms. Walter also said the initiative ignores "people needs," pointing out that too many Albertans are experiencing diminishing opportunities -- witness farmers and food bank users -- and do not have hopeful prospects for the future. She also pointed out that food needs and production are barely mentioned in the document.

Development of agriculture in the West was encouraged as good for the railroads and eastern Canadian business, and actually did little for the West. She said these industrial dynamics are still a dominant force, to the detriment of Western farmers.

She spoke against the trend toward globalization, saying we have more than enough resources in Alberta for our needs. "I request that we set goals of cooperating within our communities," she concluded. "We do not need to compete, but to redirect our efforts to meet the needs of our people in symbiotic ways that do not limit future generations."

Mr. Lund then asked her to clarify what she meant by not needing to compete. She said we need to cooperate rather than siphon profit and resources from one area to another. She suggested that we take a "bioregional approach" to resource use -- stop using fossil fuels to move food around the world, and instead create and consume food where we live. Also, rather than export food worldwide, export information to people abroad so that they can grow their own food.

2. Alberta Culinary Arts Foundation: Maurice O'Flynn

The Foundation is a non-profit organization which promotes awareness of the excellence of Alberta chefs for the benefit of hospitality, food processing, tourism and other Alberta industries. The chefs are involved in many activities internationally - including trade missions, food festivals and other promotions - to help the province compete in world markets. These partnerships with government and industry are highly effective and will be important to Alberta's prosperity in the future.

The Foundation was a driving force behind the formation of the Alberta Tourism Education Council, another example of effective partnership of industry, education and government.

Mr. O'Flynn said Alberta chefs add "sex appeal" to Alberta's $4.5 billion food and beverage manufacturing industry. They will comprise six out of seven members of the Canadian Team in the next Culinary Olympics in Frankfurt.

The Foundation believes that further steps can be taken by both industry and government so that Alberta can be more globally competitive in this area.

- Industry needs to commit more financial resources to developing and sustaining export markets.

- Government needs to spend its marketing dollars more effectively by better coordination of its international marketing efforts. For instance, there is overlap in the marketing objectives of Federal & Intergovernmental Affairs, Economic Development and Trade, Agriculture and Tourism.

- Government should remove the hands-on marketing function from the departments and centralize it in a single Provincial International Marketing Board with the sole mandate of promoting Alberta and its products around the world.

- This Board would complement infrastructure facilities like the Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc, which helps develop products, and take the next step by helping companies with packaging design, where Alberta needs improvement in order to succeed.

- The Board would be a valuable resource for small and medium sized businesses, which are Alberta's best prospects for growth, but which need the most assistance.

Mr. Lund asked how Alberta's raw product compares internationally. Mr. O'Flynn said it is among the finest.

3. Private Citizen: Elmer Cure

Mr. Cure is a retired farmer and former employee of Alberta Fish and Game, where he was Director of Public Relations. He sympathized with many of Ms. Walters' points concerning competitiveness, growth and sustainable development.

He focused on the idea that "we only put value on things when they show up on financial statements," pointing out, for example, that we tend to take our rivers for granted until we see the price for cleaning them up.

Mr. Cure agrees with the need for economic diversification to ensure stability but feels government should not be overly involved. Rather, government incentives and assistance should be tied to conserving the land and water for the long-term. In particular, he said we should expand the Landowner Habitat Program financed by the Buck for Wildlife Fund to encourage farmers to preserve the landscape. Presently, the Fund, created by hunting fees, is fully committed and there is no money left for expansion.

He also suggested that Alberta implement a coordinated resource plan for our public lands under agricultural dispositions when they are renewed and assigned. This will help ensure sustainable agriculture and Alberta's rural landscape. There is only a small amount of public land left in Southern Alberta and it is a provincial treasure.

He touched on game ranching and cited the danger of the "personal profit lobby" influencing decisions in this area, while "advice from those who have nothing else to gain but looking after public resources" has not been heeded.

Mr. Cure feels Albertans' standard of living is too high and our real quality of life is in serious decline. The popular ideal "to retire at 50 and go somewhere else to live" is not a good ideal for the future of Alberta. We need to keep Alberta a place where people want to stay. Growth for growth's sake means more cars on the road, more crowds at destination sites and more use of the lands

we've been able to preserve. If we continue to invest in big destination areas at the expense of our landscape, our tourism potential will decline. An example of resources being destroyed for growth's sake, he said, are hydro sites on the Bow and North Saskatchewan rivers which are used solely to supply peak demands. Fluctuations in the water at these sites render the areas almost sterile for recreational use.

He concluded by saying, "1992 is the year to implement a provincial conservation strategy for all development so it is sustainable environmentally. It's also time to invest our dollars, and our research and development in ways to use our land and water so that Alberta is a place we want to stay for the long term".

4. Red Deer Tourist and Convention Board: Wendy Martindale, Manager

Ms. Martindale's presentation highlighted points her organization made for the Tourism 2000 initiative. The Board carries Red Deer's municipal responsibility for tourism development and works with over 125 businesses in the community with tourism interests.

She commended Alberta Tourism for its Community Tourism Action Plan initiative, focusing on the need for communities to develop their own vision for tourism, but said the provincial tourism vision thus far has not been clear. The Tourism 2000 initiative and new marketing plan are positive moves forward.

Red Deer recognizes tourism as having great potential in contributing to economic growth and diversification for the province and for the community. The Board works with four other municipal partners as the "West Central Company of Adventurers" in a regional approach to market the area. They are the towns of Rocky Mountain House, Sylvan Lake, Olds and the M.D. of Clearwater. It is also involved in a partnership with communities along Highway 2A to promote that route.

Part of the Board's strategy is to attract Albertans for relaxing short getaways, capitalizing on the quality of life and amenities of smaller communities. Ms. Martindale expressed concern over references in the Toward 2000 Together document to a "world-class" tourism industry and "global competitiveness." She said it is important to develop a broad range of tourism products beyond the mountains and big destinations. Sophisticated travellers want to know about our natural environment, heritage and culture, and we need to provide unique opportunities for visitors to meet our people and take part in community celebrations.

Other points she made:

- Alberta Tourism should also direct efforts to getting Albertans to travel within Alberta, therefore, keeping dollars from flowing out;

- all Albertans - not just those in the industry - need to be aware of the rewards of hosting tourists in terms of such benefits as pride in their communities;

- we need to develop more partnerships to include all persons and organizations with an interest in tourism; and

- our tourism industry depends on two resources, human and natural. We must protect our natural resources and develop a "learning culture" to provide a skilled tourism workforce.

Mr. Sparrow pointed out that the government may seem to have moved slowly in developing a tourism vision for the province, but it wanted the vision to develop from the "bottom up" starting with the communities. The Community Tourism Action Plan was put in place to accomplish this.

5. Citizens' Dialogue - Community Overview: Marilyn Haley, Craig Curtis

Ms. Haley and Mr. Curtis had just come from a two-day meeting of representatives of 45 stakeholder groups in the Central Alberta region designed to generate input for the Toward 2000 Together process. They have not had time to distil the results of the conference, but presented summaries of the views expressed in their own focus groups.

Ms. Haley said the overriding priority in her group was the need to foster an entrepreneurial culture - an attitude, atmosphere, or climate promoted by government, business, education and labour, both organized and unorganized. The characteristic of such a climate is that people would want "to be a part of the machinery that makes things happen" to strengthen the economy. Strategies for achieving this objective include:

- building of partnerships among employers, educators, governments, labour and individuals at both the provincial and local levels;

- fostering a learning culture in which all the partners emphasize that learning is important;

- using a problem-solving approach in schools, emphasizing process rather than information;

- creating an entrepreneurial attitude through a concerted effort of all partners, as in the example of the Participation campaign which was very successful in changing attitudes about fitness; and

- promoting a skilled, adaptable work force. A registered apprenticeship program might be one strategy in this effort.

Government's role is to facilitate and to cut red tape. Industry must get involved and make a commitment to training. For every dollar business spends on training in Canada, $2 is spent in the United States, $5 in Japan, and $8 in Germany.

Government should also encourage the development and application of research but not get too involved. An appropriate involvement might be to provide encouragement through tax breaks and/or tax incentives.

Mr. Curtis brought the following points from his group.

- There needs to be a greater partnership between business and government in education. Industry needs to take a greater role in upgrading workforce skills, with the government acting as catalyst.

- Access to education is critical. Training should be decentralized and degree granting shared at the local level.

- Training programs should be developed and implemented at an earlier stage in the school curriculum. One should not have to wait until the post-secondary level for skills training.

- We must promote equal opportunity in the workplace by maximizing opportunities for women and visible minorities.

- Fostering of entrepreneurial attitudes should start early in the school program.

- Government should move away from direct financing and loan guarantee activity and promote economic development through facilitation, networking, and information sharing. Financial incentives might include tax incentives and legislation to allow self-financing initiatives.

- An economic development strategy should balance environmental protection and job creation evenly. We should maximize benefits to be gained from developing environmental industries.

- Government should leave communities to devise their own economic development initiatives while providing the infrastructure, such as educational institutions, to support their efforts.

- Government should help to change the perception of young people regarding careers in the field of science and technology, and continue to provide funds for expanding R & D more broadly across the province.

Mr. Jonson pointed out that a recent study asked parents what they feel is needed to strengthen Canada's economy. The answers suggested more emphasis on science and technology. Yet, when asked what they want their children to become, parents tended to choose such careers as doctor, lawyer, teacher, and other jobs related to the civil service. He pointed out there is a dichotomy here which will make it difficult to change attitudes.

Mr. Curtis commented that it would be important to start early in the school system to introduce children to options beyond the traditional career paths.

6. Red Deer College: Dr. Ed Luterbach, President

Dr. Luterbach said he agreed with many points in the Toward 2000 Together document and would focus only on his points of disagreement. He said the document does not place enough emphasis on some areas, including education -- the key to Alberta's future.

In Alberta, the wealth-generating industries - especially agriculture and oil - are no longer able to support our lifestyle. Efforts to diversify by exporting value-added products and finding market niches are still insufficient to support our way of living. We urgently need to develop more wealth-generating industries that can compete on a world scale.

Historically economic development strategies focused on "smokestack chasing", or "beggar thy neighbour". Recently, the focus has been on job creation by providing subsidies to companies to locate here; however once subsidies are removed, too many of these cannot compete. Dr. Luterbach suggested that "smokestack chasing", "beggar thy neighbour", and/or government schemes for job creation are not particularly appropriate to deal with Alberta's economic needs.

The strategy with the most payoff will be to ensure an educated labour force, a strong private sector, minimal government presence, a conducive tax system, and encouragement of industries with the capacity to generate new wealth.

Funding for education has not kept pace with cost. Alberta's education system is showing evidence of less flexibility and more insularity. Access is being denied and institutions are not being responsive to the needs of society. These characteristics will rapidly reduce the quality of our labour force.

Post-secondary education, especially at the community college level, has been an effective economic development strategy, by not only attracting business and industry to a highly skilled workforce, but by also providing a skill set that in itself leads to the creation of new industry.

Mr. Luterbach said higher priority should be attached to the role of colleges and technical institutes. He recommended closer ties between business, industry and education, more flexible delivery mechanisms, and greater currency in curriculum. Also, one or more of Alberta's two-year colleges should become four-year colleges to provide polytechnic and other applied degrees to their array of offerings.

Halvar Jonson, Chairman of the Education Caucus, noted that there appeared to be growing support regarding degree-granting powers for colleges.

7. Red Deer Chamber of Commerce: Pat Henry, Executive Director

Mr. Henry had just come from the Citizens' Dialogue and, therefore, did not have a formal written submission.

He briefly outlined the Chamber's comments as mentioned in their meeting.

- We consume 20% of our agricultural products and export 80%. We need to concentrate on continued diversification of our food processing industry.

- Government should continue to promote research and development and to encourage business and industry to get involved in R & D.

- We should look at research from a Western Canadian regional perspective. For instance, Alberta is already well-known for its expertise in medical research. We should continue developing this area and perhaps leave oil grains to Saskatchewan. Alberta is already taking this regional approach to some extent.

- We need to encourage science and technology in the schools and break down the stigma of technical programs. One positive step is Red Deer's Partners for Progress program, which brings business into the schools from kindergarten to Grade 12. The object is to show students up close what is involved in all

aspects of the business and to get children looking at a variety of career options at an early stage.

- In tourism, too much money is spent looking beyond our borders to develop tourism, especially in light of the fact that some 60% of our tourism industry is in-province tourism.

Mr. Jonson asked Mr. Henry what we should do to keep the value-added jobs and other spin-offs of research developed in Alberta. Mr. Henry suggested government could provide more information for Alberta businesses regarding potential markets for applications of Alberta-developed technology.

8. Town of Ponoka, Economic Development Committee: Barry Neath, Chairman

Mr. Neath explained that Ponoka's Economic Development Committee is new. The Committee invited ideas from the community on what needs to be done by the year 2000 for economic development. The main point to come from that exercise is that the community has to grow from within.

The community wants to promote local investment through "properly structured incentives" rather than seek outside investment. The community needs help in developing information packages, and would like to see the provincial government help provide this type of support.

Mr. Neath said the community realises it has a lot of tourism potential and plans to look at developing it. He said the Junior Achievement program is very important - all the business students in the local high school can now fill out a job application, for instance.

The community is working with Alberta Hospital, and local businesses are hiring people from the hospital. This cooperation will continue. The community has an excellent quality of life and considers this an asset in terms of economic development.

Ms. Osterman said quality of life is often overlooked in economic development and she was glad to hear the community is taking it into consideration this way.

Mr. Jonson asked Mr. Neath to define "properly structured incentives." Mr. Neath pointed to the town's Main Street program in which businesses are given grants only after they show some effort to do something for themselves first.

Mr. Sparrow pointed out that the government's Local Development Initiative program ties right in with the idea of development from within.

9. Town of Didsbury: Clem Kuelker

Mr. Kuelker said his presentation would also focus on the need for the community to develop from within. The shortfall of capital investment has been one of the greatest hindrances to community economic development. Didsbury's solution is to seek more flexibility for local economic development through provincial policies allowing for local investment without the fear of losing that investment.

It was proposed that government pass legislation to provide bond guarantees for residents who invest in local business development opportunities. The bonds would be sold to form an investment pool for equity and infrastructure funding for business development that will enhance a community's long-term economic growth.

The benefit of such a plan is that it utilizes local investment dollars now sitting in savings accounts; uses local business expertise; focuses on smaller companies that can be profitable in smaller markets; and distributes capital over a greater number of ventures to minimize potential losses.

The community's commitment would be to:

- develop an economic development strategy;
- set up a community development corporation;
- establish criteria for investment;
- develop a procedure to screen applicants;
- contract third party services to investigate the economic viability of all applicants;
- supervise and manage the pool; and
- guarantee the interest rate.

Community bonds would be offered at 2% less than the current rate of interest, guaranteed by the municipality. The province would guarantee the principal, not unlike current loan guarantees. To be eligible, a business must create jobs, have proven management expertise, show potential for expansion and community development, and be economically viable.

The pool would be used for creation of infrastructure, equity buy-in, leverage with existing institutions and direct loans.

Mr. Sparrow said the idea of community bonds has come forward in the Local Development Initiative process and he would like to see details of Didsbury's proposal. There are already examples of this type of bond fund in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Scotland and the United States.

Ms. Osterman perceived a dichotomy between the idea of an entrepreneurial culture and guaranteed interest and principal. Should there not be some risk? Mr. Kuelker agreed but said that some individuals could not be asked to put money on the line without a guarantee. The provincial guarantee needs a limit, perhaps a maximum per capita per community, in order to limit the province's risk.

10. Town of Caroline: Bob Kelly, Town Councillor

Mr. Kelly had several points to make about changes needed in education, health and welfare and the criminal code.

- We need to educate children better in the basics and stop moving them through the school system without their having learned basic reading and math skills.

- He said he is "disgusted" with the apprenticeship program in Alberta. Apprentices are just "guinea pig labour," getting only two or three months a year of schooling. In addition, while electricians, carpenters and plumbers have to spend thousands of dollars on tools, there is no mechanism for writing that cost off. They should enjoy the same write-off incentives enjoyed by business people. They don't receive enough incentives in the current system to become their best. The Unemployment Insurance (UI) system makes it difficult for people to go to school and take apprenticeships. The school system, UI system and welfare system need to work together to give people the incentive, backing, and living essentials to get the training they need. The current system is unfair in comparison to the student loan system for people who go to university. "Don't boot tradespeople out the door while they are trying to learn their skills."

- The welfare system should be revised to give people, especially single parents, the opportunity to go back to school to get the training they need to support themselves and their families. They should have access to better daycare and the opportunity to learn in order to get off welfare. If a person on welfare goes to school and gets a part-time job, the income is deducted from the welfare payment, reducing the incentive to get off welfare. If we change the system, we can make it possible for more people to work and become taxpayers.

- There need to be better facilities for battered women and opportunities for the counselling of batterers in the local communities. Facilities in Edmonton and Calgary are out of reach for rural people.

- The criminal justice system should enforce the laws to their full extent regarding drinking and driving. Too many people are repeat offenders because the penalties are applied too leniently.

- The government should not allow farm foreclosures, but should take over payments until the family is back on its feet, and then recover the funds. Too many young people are losing their farm legacies as their parents' farms are foreclosed upon.

- If we give tax incentives to businesses to locate in the cities, why not give incentives to businesses to locate in small communities so that young people do not have to move to the big cities for opportunities.

11. Village of Linden: Ross Dean, Municipal Administrator

Mr. Dean is also with the Big Country Tourist Association. He said current provincial and federal red tape tends to hamper development.

The dollars are there, people have money in the bank. The initiative and entrepreneurial spirit is also there, but a lot of government red tape discourages people. In the case of environmental concerns, these can be addressed through sunset clauses, instead of delays, when not enough is known.

There are a lot of innovative technologies and products in Alberta, Mr. Dean said, but nobody is doing anything with them. He suggested government restrictions might be standing in the way.

Mr. Dean suggested the concept of small business insurance, like hail and crop insurance, so that small business does not have to lay off people during an economic downturn. He said the government has gone overboard in limiting tourism signage and should allow more promotional signage. He also said the government needs to do a better job of sharing economic development information with business.